

Play and Child Development

Considerations from a Comparative Ethnographic Research in Two Rural Argentinian Communities

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present the preliminary results of an ongoing ethnographic research on childrearing and child development from an ecological approach among two rural Argentinean populations: an indigenous population (Mbya Guaraní) located in the northeastern rainforest and a creole population (Molinos) located in the northwest highlands. The study adopts a comparative approach to children's play activities. We analyze play as part of children's formative experiences in the context of their participation in household activities and their relationships with adults and peers. We focus on aspects such as the role of movement and motor skills in children's play; the characteristics of spaces and materials involved in children's play; the playmates for babies and older children and the social value assigned to play in the context of household daily routines. The complementary use of different observation techniques, interviews and videotapes facilitated the recognition of ecological factors affecting children's play in each setting, showing intra and intercultural variability. We selected several scenes recorded during fieldwork which are examples of contexts for play activities of children of different ages. Based on that, we identify the ecological factors affecting play including material and symbolic conditions that characterize the way of life of each enclave.

INTRODUCTION

Play and games in early childhood have been addressed by different disciplines and from several theoretical perspectives. Despite their differences, all of them agree in stressing that play is a central experience in young children's life and an important tracer of 'healthy' or 'normal' development in terms of cognitive, motor and emotional skills acquisition. In the field of psychology and psychoanalysis, for instance, play is defined as any children's activity based upon the search for pleasure, affection and security, which allows the expression of their creativity and autonomy, and contributes

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The Oriental Anthropologist, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2014, Pages 241-266

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with the construction of their identity, the command of their mobility and the progressive knowledge of their own body and environment (Freud, 1911; Winnicott, 1971; Piaget, 1994; Chokler, 2005). Some authors (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983; Piaget, 1994) examined the relationships among playing, thinking and language acquisition in order to explain intellectual development, stressing the relevance of play activities for learning rules, practices and social conventions.

On the other hand, ethnographic approaches have shown that children's playful activities exhibit a wide diversity within and between societies due to a combination of factors in specific environments, ranging from subsistence activities to social representations and values on children's development. By implication, the impact of different family values and childrearing methods is likely to influence the toys and games with which children play (Rossie, 2005). More recent approaches (Rogoff et al., 2007; Paradise and Haan, 2009; Codonho, 2007; Rossie, 2005) consider play not only as a mechanism of imitation of adult roles and activities and the internalization of rules, but also as an activity which allows the transmission and creation of new knowledge among peers. According to Rossie (2005: 90): "A lot of play activities and toys help children to integrate themselves in the primary social groups in which they grow up, to adapt to the roles offered to them and to internalize the norms and values prevailing in these groups." In addition to this Codonho (2007) emphasizes that this kind of knowledge, norms and values appropriation would explain not only the continuity of traditions but also intergenerational change dynamics.

Following Padawer and Enriz (2009) play is part of different formative daily experiences. Play activities become relevant to thinking about children's approach towards different kinds of knowledge since during such activities the groups of peers conform a 'play community' (Larricq, 1993) in which varied knowledge related to the environment, and physical skills, circulate.

Another theoretical approach which deals – though tangentially – with play is that one developed by Whiting and Whiting team. Their theoretical concept of development niche, or settings to which children are allotted and where their daily life and interactions take place with different partners (adults, other children), mainly focuses upon who the frequent partners in play activities are, and upon how the change of setting fosters children's socialization process (Whiting and Pope Edwards 1997).

Lancy's work (2007) analyses the western premise that play between mother and infant triggers children's normal development, and presents ethnographic examples which prove that variability, duration or frequency of this activity among societies is too ample to accept this generalization without any reservations. In this sense, the author states that "in the study of child development, however, there is still a strong

tendency to see patterns found in mainstream European-American society as the norm. Alternative patterns are seen as aberrant..." (Lancy, 1996: 11). However, according to him, patterns are very different from one society to another. "Certainly a characteristic and socially sanctioned parent-child interaction style is a part of these patterns, but so, too are adult-child and child-child interaction styles, the playform inventory, rites of passage, and prescriptions regarding such things as children and work and adolescents and marriage. All contribute to building a distinct and thorough curriculum for the creation of competent adults" (Lancy, 1996: 19-20). In this sense, Lancy's work (1996) about play emphasises the role of routines for raising children. These routines are shared and they are passed on from generation to generation and shape significantly children-adults interactions.

In short, the study of play and games highlights discussions linked to gender differences, adult-child and peers relationships, children's creativity and agency, tradition and cultural change, and more directly, learning and childrearing.

Our ethnographic research on child development and rearing follows an ecological approach, informed by Vygotsky (1978), Bronfenbrenner (1987), Whiting and Edwards (1997), Harkness and Super (1986), Weisner (1984), Gaskings (2000) and Rogoff, Moore, Behnosh, Dexter, and Correa-Chavez (2007), Rogoff, Moore, Behnosh, Dexter, Correa-Chavez, and Solís (2010).

These perspectives understand child development as an adaptation to different ecological conditions, i.e. various 'developmental niches' (Weisner 1984; Harkness and Super 1986) leading to different development trajectories (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni and Maynard, 2003). Harkness and Super (1986) suggested the concept of 'developmental niches' which refers to a system that consists of three basic components: "(1) the physical and social settings of the child's everyday life; (2) culturally regulated customs of child care and childrearing; and (3) the parental ethnotheories." The latter represents "specific cultural models, rooted in the collective history of the community, that provide a framework for adults to build experience and knowledge that guide their rearing practices" (Harkness and Super, 1986: 552).

Taking this into account we cannot study play without considering its relationship to children's daily routines, interactions with caregivers and other members of the community, as well as material conditions like ecological characteristics and household features and spatial localization.

We consider children's play as a fundamental activity of children's everyday life, which sometimes overlaps with other activities, and whose limits are difficult to define. In this sense, we start from a broad notion of play – as a central activity in the process of early childhood development– since it fosters the learning of cognitive, emotional,

physical and social skills which are relevant to children's identity as members of a certain community (Gauvain, 1998, Ingold, 2000; Rogoff et al., 2007).

In relation to this, some questions should be asked: what are the ecological conditions that make children's play possible? Which factors promote interaction between children and other persons during play activities? How does age and gender influence children's play and their use of toys? What is the role of parental ethontheories and expert knowledge about play in each society? In this paper we attempt to answer some of these questions based on the results of an ongoing study carried out among rural populations representing two contrasting ecological contexts: the Mbya Guaraní of the Argentinian northeast rainforest (Misiones province) and a creole population located in the highlands and semiarid areas in the northwest of Argentina (Molinos, Salta Province)¹. This work represents a first comparative study of children's play activities in both enclaves in the frame of their everyday life at home, analyzing the value of such experiences and interactions in the process of learning and construction of children's cultural identity.

Methodological Framework

Ethnographic research allows the identification of factors relevant to development in specific ecological niches (Weisner, 1984) by means of observation and recording of children's everyday experiences and interactions in those spheres in which they frequently participate (Remorini, 2011, 2012).

In this sense, we would like to highlight the heuristic potential of observing domestic subsistence activities as appropriate contexts for approaching the topic (Malinowski, 1964; Weisner, 1998, Gaskings, 2000; Martínez and Crivos, 1996; Remorini, 2010, 2012) since: 1. Daily activities performed by the members of a Domestic Unit (DU) constitute the context in which children build their main experiences in terms of development, in direct and constant relationship with their caretakers; 2. We are able to contrast parental ethnotheories about development and rearing by reference to daily and concrete behavior and interactions between children and their caretakers; 3. It is possible to analyze rearing in articulation to other subsistence activities of the members of the DU and the community as a whole.

As Rogoff points out "children's ordinary, everyday activities are key to their development (...) child and context are not separable; the unit of analysis is the situated person in context (activity, practices), not the individual separated from the environment of which they are a part" (2010: 131).

In the case of infants we agree with Whiting and Edwards (1997) when they posit that adults play a relevant role – although not exclusive—in the specific settings allotted

to the children, which result in possible group of partners and interactions. Thus, we believe children's activities are mainly structured by adults' everyday activities (Weisner 1998; Gaskings, 2000; Remorini, 2010, 2011), who either allow or limit children's actions according to what they consider appropriate or inappropriate for the children (ideas concerning well-being, the person, children's characteristics in every developmental stage) and to the aims of each activity. Nevertheless, based upon the results of our ethnographic research and in alignment with other writers' proposals, we state that even in the case of infants, they possess enormous plasticity and selection, transformation and innovation capacity (Toren, 1993; Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía Arauz, Correa-Chávez and Angelillo, 2003; Pires, 2010; Remorini, 2010).

Our research is based on the combination and complementary use of observation (systematic, participant and spot observation), semi-structured interviews, photographs and videotapes. Based on the observation record, we interviewed caregivers in order to identify 'parental ethnotheories' (Harkness and Super, 1986) related to children's growth and development. Despite our emphasis on observation, people's knowledge and categories are necessary to understand the activities and behaviors being observed.

At present, we are working on a model for recording information about child rearing practices at the domestic level that includes a section on play and toys (see Appendix 1). This instrument has facilitated the description of children's activities and interactions with their caregivers. Using this model we tried to recognize several factors that take part in children's play and use of toys, for a comparative analysis of similarities and differences in both settings. Our analysis focuses on: the role of movement and motor skills in babies and young children's play; the characteristics of verbal and nonverbal expressions in children's play; the characteristics of spaces in which children play; the relationships between children and their natural environment during play; the play materials; the playmates for babies and older children; and the social value assigned to play by caregivers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For our analysis, we have selected several scenes recorded during fieldwork which are examples of contexts for play activities of children of different ages. Based on this selection, we expect to identify the ecological factors affecting play including material and symbolic conditions that characterize the way of life of each enclave. Due to space limitations, out of the different aspects analyzed we only develop in this paper the following: the characteristics of spaces and materials involved in children's play; the playmates for babies and older children and the social value assigned to play by caregivers.

- Situation 1 :** 16.30 PM: JN gives Ma (2 years old) the T-shirt she was wearing this morning and Ma puts it in the pitcher full of water. She takes it in and out many times, then she squeezes it dry with her hands, and hits it against the floor, imitating the movements women perform when they do the laundry. JN looks at her and laughs. Ma repeats this again (...) (CR/MLXIII. 7.1.1-12, Yvy Pytã, 2003)².
- Situation 2 :** (...) 11.10 AM: JCa brings a *mbaraka*³ from the room and starts playing it. AG stands up and fetches a dry pumpkin and gives it to Ub who plays both and dances. Everybody laughs. Then Ub plays with the *mbaraka*. as if it was a telephone. AG looks at him and says: "Hello. Ubaldo? Are you coming this week?", Everybody laughs. (...) JCa goes and fetches a plastic bottle and hits it on the floor. Ir takes the pumpkin and plays it. AG (father) stands up and goes to the patio, grabs a tree branch, cuts it and tells Ir '*Ko, kunai, takuapu*'⁴ and shows her how to tap it on the floor, while he grabs the pumpkin. He asks Ub to scrape the bottle as if it was a guitar, and AG sings the same song. Ir throws the branch on the floor and cries. AG gives her the *mbaraka* They laugh. JCa grabs another stick and hits it as if it was *takuapu*. Ub sings. JC hums the melody of the song AG was singing. (...) Ub puts a stick inside the bottle and drags it towards the patio, riding it as if it was a horse. (CR/MLXII.7.4. 6-7, Yvy Pytã, 2001).
- Situation 3 :** 10.00 AM: Viki (V) is standing on a brick which she climbs up and down from many times, helping herself out with one of the canes that is part of the structure of the tent (built by one of her brothers). She also moves to and from, takes her leans backwards while she hangs grabbing the cane with her hands, or swings her body bending her knees. While this is happening, she babbles and licks the cane. The other two girls (six and three years old) watch her, pick her up, try to move her to a different place, but V complains and climbs down to the floor. V's main caregiver (the mother) is watching the situation and warns the other girls about possible dangers ("do not let 'the brunette' fall..."). While V is doing this, the other girls are role-playing a "nativity scene". The elder girls distribute the roles, rehearse the dialogues and select the materials. V does not participate in the preparations. She follows one of her sisters who is holding a doll wrapped in a blanket. V tries to get the doll but her sister stops her. But she goes to fetch another one and gives it to V. (CR/Mo.3.1.UD4, Santa Rosa, 2011).
- Situation 4 :** 14.30 PM: GR (mother) brings a box with some materials into the dining room where the girls are. The objects have been selected by their mother and her husband for the girls to use. There also are some factory—made

toys. L (2 years old) goes from the floor to her mother's lap, plays with some wooden blocks and says that she is building 'houses for the cats'. She inserts a plastic sweep into a hole in the wooden block, 'cleans' plastic animals with a plastic sweep, heaps up the wooden blocks on a plastic horse and a doll, etc. GR watches the girls and occasionally intervenes by directing the action (eg. She asks L "What's this?"), or by offering some help or mediating in the girls' interactions: offering or removing an object, etc. During this scene, D (4 years old) spends most of the time performing. In one of her performances, she looks at CR (anthropologist) and says 'this is my house with the hills, you know?' (CR/Mo.3.1.UD3, 2010). (Figure 1)



Situation 5 : 11.30 AM: J (one year and ten months old) is in the courtyard. The boy is standing next to a wall, there is a bucket full of water on his right and a bag with building material on his left. J sweeps the wall upwards and downwards with a plastic brush (four times). Meanwhile, MT (his mother) watches him and says to him 'my Joaquín will be a painter'. J looks at her and laughs and continues with the action. (CR/Mo.3.1.UD2, 2011). (Figure 2)



Situation 6 : 9.10 AM: J (mother) comes and sits in the kitchen and puts a pot on the oven. Ub (boy, 2 years old) comes close to Ir (girl, 3 years old) who keeps playing with a knife and a branch with leaves and looks at her. Ir cuts tree branches. Ub looks at her. Ir brings the branches to the kitchen and puts them in a pot. (...) 9.20 AM: Ir puts the leaves in the pot (before that she gives them to Ub who cuts them with a knife and puts them in the pot). Ub goes and fetches more leaves. AG (father) tells CR (anthropologist) 'she went for meat to cook'. They stir the leaves in the pot. JCG comes closer (elder brother). Ir crushes a branch in the pot as if it was a mortar. JCG goes to fetch more leaves and says 'Ko va'e'. He brings more leaves and she crushes them in the pot (...) (CR/MI.XII. 7.4. Yvy Pytã, 2001). (Figure 3)



The Characteristics of Spaces in which Children Play

In the first months of life it is the parents, but also older siblings or other caregivers, the ones who 'organize' the space and time to play and provide the materials for it. The materials available to play depend on the space children are allowed to play in, based on caregivers beliefs and social rules. Parents guide their actions in accordance with their

cultural constructions of childhood, their children's health and the risks involved. In this sense, there are some places that are considered to be dangerous for children. For example, Mbya children are not allowed to walk around and play near cementeries and some pathways and areas inhabited by 'evil spirits' which may cause several illnesses. Apart from that, there exists few restrictions to children's circulation through space.

Molinos people argue that infants could be 'frightened' (*'asustados'*) due to a traumatic, unexpected or stressful experience or event (e.g. if a child is dropped or struck, or has seen or been attacked by an animal such as a snake, chicken, or dog). *'Susto'* is a very common ailment in the Andean region, and women state that they should be attentive to their children all the time, paying close attention to who the children are with and where they wander around to avoid having them be frightened. In this sense, there are some restrictions to younger children's movement around the area, their social excursions to visit other people or children (Remorini, 2012).

Our findings suggest that in both ecological contexts adults view infants as being particularly vulnerable and at risk of a number of illnesses. Parents' health concerns lead to specific limitations on the child's activities aimed at ensuring the child's well-being (Remorini, 2012).

At this point we want to emphasize differences with respect to the use of space by children in the two contexts. In Molinos, there are differences between the houses located in the center of the village (*pueblo*), where children spend most of the day indoors, or the courtyards of the same, and consequently, playmates are limited to close relatives. Some mothers say that they prefer their children to stay at home and play under their surveillance. In households at the outskirts (*orillas*) or hills (*cerros*), children have the opportunity to wander away from their homes accompanied by other children from nearby households. These children walk longer distances not only to play but also to perform tasks that contribute to household subsistence.

Molinos' households are not homogeneous in terms of size, composition and facilities. All households at the centre of the town have access to basic services (electricity, gas and sanitary service); in contrast, families that live in peripheral areas have no access to electricity, therefore, have no television or other entertainment artifacts at home. These aspects also influence childrens' use of space: the little children of the peripheral areas spend a considerable part of the day in open spaces, close to or away from their homes, accompanying or participating in their elder siblings' games or activities as opposed to the children in the town who usually play inside the house, and when they do play in public places, they are always accompanied by their parents.

By contrast, in Mbya communities, children who can walk independently form peer groups and explore spaces that exceed the domestic sphere and the direct surveillance

of adults. In this sense, children's movement across different community spaces is frequent.

Play Materials

In scenes one, two and six children imagine a situation or create a fiction: they imagine a telephone conversation, or that they are collecting food and cooking it, or pretend that they are riding a horse, or that they are doing the laundry or that they are participating in a ceremony where men and women are playing musical instruments allotted according to their gender. In these cases, children use objects which would not be used in 'real' situations (cloth instead of T-shirt, bottle and stick instead of horse, branch instead of *takuapu*, bottle instead of guitar, brush instead of paintbrush, etc).

In scene two the objects selected by the father and given to the children are allotted according to the 'ideal' gender division in Mbya society. The father gives the boys objects which represent the guitar (*mbaepu*) and the pumpkin rattle (instruments played by men in the ceremonies at the *opy*⁵), and he gives the girl the *takuapu*.

In Mbya communities we have also observed the manipulation of objects or waste materials which are used by adults or other children or which have been discarded by them. Some 'toys' – constructed by children themselves – represent the little versions of weapons and other artifacts (mortars for instance) which belong to the Mbya 'traditional' activities of subsistence. In reference to this, as it has been mentioned by Schaden (1998), Anderson (1987) and Larricq (1993), in some other Guaraní communities, we have not observed the manufacturing or construction of toys specially designed for little children. The only toy especially manufactured for the children to play (*mitã*) is an object (a ball) made with maize leaves used to play a game called *manga* in which up to 10-15 children and also adults participate. However its construction is quite rare at present. Nevertheless, we have recently observed an increased presence of manufactured toys (dolls, cars, balls) and other objects (tricycles, prams) due to donations of ONGs and/or individuals. Only a few parents buy toys for their children (football) though there is a growing tendency in some communities.

For the Molinos community, the presence of manufactured toys, computers and TV is usual in the village households. In the households located in *orillas* (outskirts) we observed several situations (e.g. scene three) in which children use different materials available at home combining industrialized toys with items from the natural environment. It is common for parents to give toys for birthdays or special occasions dates such as Christmas (which is not usual in Mbya communities). In this sense, access and use of these elements is related to differences in household incomes, or the attendance to nurseries or kindergardens, where the teachers select toys and books for their 'pedagogical' value, which does not happen in the Mbya communities.

Finally, we want to highlight the relevance of body and motor skills in younger children's play. In the first months of life, as we see in scenes one and three there is manipulation of objects and their sensory exploration with the use of body movements. This type of activity enables the child to learn about qualities of objects, while using them and learning to interact with other subjects. In scene three the girl plays with a brick, she climbs up and down many times using the help of canes that are part of a structure (tent). She uses her body in an experimental way: moves to and from, takes her head backwards grabbing the cane with her hands, or swings her body by bending her knees.

Playmates for Babies and Older Children

At an early age, play is described by some psychological approaches as 'lonely play'. However, as we observed, it never takes place completely alone in these communities. On the contrary, children request the presence of others with whom they engage games, in order to provide them with objects, to tell them about their 'discoveries' or to obtain some kind of response in reference to their actions (e.g. words, gestures) which motivate and acknowledge children's behavior, as we see in scenes three and five.

In Mbya communities the family organization is based mostly on the patrilocal extended family, whose houses are located close in space or sometimes around the same courtyard. This spatial arrangement results in three generations often sharing household chores and children and adults spending most of their time together (Remorini, 2009). Childrearing is shared among members of the household, but Mbya women are the ones in charge of looking after their infants during the first months of life and actively take part in children's play. As the child grows up, its care is shared with other members of the household including older children. Boys older than two deepen their relationships with their fathers and other male relatives and share with them various activities. However, girls stay close to their female relatives, learning domestic tasks at an early age. In conclusion, children and adults are together in most daily activities (Remorini, 2009).

As we said previously, from the Mbya perspective, children are considered vulnerable to different illnesses, and therefore should stay in the house most of the time and avoid certain places full of 'bad spirits' that might cause eventual harm (Remorini, 2009). As children grow, spaces in which they wander are extended and consequently children turn away from their parents' supervision. This brings about greater interaction with other children and more active participation in their games as well as a better knowledge of their surroundings beyond their home environment. This also requires the development of body skills suitable to move around the forest and to appropriate its resources. In short, children's constantly moving around and being part of hetero-

geneous age and sex groups are relevant experiences in which children learn by participating in games and activities organized by elder children (for instance: an expedition to collect wild fruit, having a bath and doing the laundry in the river, etc).

Different from Mbya communities, in Molinos there is greater diversity in household composition. This depends on the father's job and where the houses are located (i.e. in the centre of the village, in the outskirts or on the hills).

The displacement generated by outside economic activities results in some cases in a household structure where adult or elderly women take the family leadership and the responsibility for their grandchildren's rearing. Men, in general, do not participate actively in childrearing, this being an almost exclusively feminine activity. Elder siblings are not usually responsible for the caring of the younger ones, except in the hills and the village outskirts where we have observed that elder children participate more as infant caregivers (Figure 4).



In nuclear households, infants spend most of their time with their mothers or playing alone. But, the situation is different between households constituted by extended families located in the outskirts. As we can see in scene three, although the girl seems to be playing alone, children (brother and cousins) and adults interact with her: they watch her, pick her up, try to move her to a different place, give her objects (a doll) or warn her about possible dangers.

In both enclaves women's activities affect the space, the time and the kind of play partners. For example, visiting other domestic units is a frequent activity of Mbya women, who carry their children with them. On the contrary, visits are not frequent in the case of Molinos's women. The scarcity of extra-familial relationships is associated with the habit of 'staying at home', not of visiting places and people in the village, except for purchases or transactions.

The Social Value Assigned to Play by Caregivers

According to Harkness and Super's (1986), ethnotheories play a major role in creating the child's developmental niche. Caregivers attempt to organize physical and social settings for children that are consistent with their own ethnotheories. Appropriate social skills are defined by the cultural ideas about person, childhood, rearing and development. In this sense, some of the differences observed in the play behavior in the two contexts show the differences in the parents' ethnotheories and expectations as regards the activities, knowledge and skills children should develop for their present and future.

In the case of Mbya communities we recorded that attitudes and values in relation to children's play vary depending on whether they are infants or toddlers. Play is usually considered to be the only activity of infants. Toddlers are supposed to play by collaborating with their parents, or older siblings who are the second most important caregivers after the mother. Also Mbya parents distinguish between infants and older children by the type of games they play and toys they use. Thus, our informants stated that *imba'e viky* is the kind of game that characterizes the babies (*mitãĩ*), who are entertained by manipulating objects. In contrast, *ñevanga* means that children play depicting scenes or roles, which is more characteristic of children between two and three years of age. Likewise, they stated that *avai* and *kuñai* (boys and girls respectively) 'play the same games together' but when they grow, they tend to segregate due to the different upbringing *mitã* and *kuña mitã* (boys and girls older than two years old) receive. Another aspect caregivers mentioned to make a distinction between infants and toddlers is connected to new kinds of learning and *mitã*'s increasing responsibility in domestic chores. In this sense, play appears to be a relevant criterion in distinguishing stages of the life cycle. One religious expression used in relation to children is *ñevanga poranguei*, that is, "the privileged who play" (Cadogan, 1992: 131). The possibility to play with various objects, to share games with others, to role-play and to create fiction-stories, makes a significant difference between infants and elder children from the Mbya perspective. As a result, some games played by older children consist of representations of scenes in which children use toys similar to but smaller than the objects used by adults in various activities, or that children adapt for the purposes of these representations (see for example scenes five and six). Our informants stressed this constitutes training

for their future as adults. Despite economic changes, 'traditional' sustenance activities are still practised as well as games which are supposed to 'train' children in valuable activities and skills for their sustenance. This is why in Mbya communities we can observe how children skillfully use and transform objects they use in games.

By contrast, Molinos parents don't put stress on their young children's contributions to household subsistence but rather stress the need for children to attend educational institutions (kinder, school, university). Compared to the past, children today are not usually involved in subsistence activities, specially in town households, since their parents have 'non-traditional' jobs such as building workers or shop assistants. Only in two households from the *orillas* we observed the participation of children (older than seven years old) in domestic tasks (wood collection, cooking, agriculture, sheperding). In the hills, however, traditional subsistence practices like cattle breeding and farming still prevail, and boys are the ones who generally participate in these activities together with adult men and women. Children usually play with other people more frequently than with their parents and playing takes less time than other 'productive' activities highly valued by adults.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results presented so far allow the identification of certain aspects relevant to a comparative analysis of playful activities in two contrasting ecological contexts. Though our findings are preliminary, they offer the possibility of posing hypotheses to be inquired in future empirical work instances. Also, this article represents a contribution to ethnographic knowledge about play in the framework of child development and children's daily life in both regions considered.

In the case of Argentinian Northwest, the scarce references to play – children and adults' – have been made only from a folcloric perspective in which 'traditional' games are presented as part of a 'customs repertoire', not considering their link with other daily practices. In this context, this work represents the first ethnographic approach to this topic in these communities of the Andes.

In the case of Mbya-Guarani communities, in classic ethnographic literature about this people there exist scarce reference to children's play, apart from some comments about 'traditional' games and toys (e.g. Jesuit Franz Muller's work about Guarani groups in Paraguay (Muller 1989), Metraux's synthesis as part of the Handbook of South American Indians (1948), Schaden's comparative work in Brazil (1998) and Hanke's descriptions (1995) about the groups who inhabited the jungle of Misiones and Paraguay). Among them, Schaden is the only one who addresses the topic of childhood widely. From his perspective, "children are treated like adults", "Guarani children's culture is almost non-existent" and toys "are mostly limited to the imitation of adults' activities" (Schaden, 1998: 80). More recently, play has been analyzed

by some Argentinian anthropologists with different interests and methodologies. For example, in Larricq's work (1993) about Mbya's life cycle, play is analyzed – not in detail—as part of the aspects which define childhood. Finally, Noelia Enriz's works (2009) focus on children's play as part of Mbya children's everyday experiences, addressing aspects such as children representations about ethnic identity, territoriality, interethnic relationships and their relationships with formal education spheres. This last work, and some other more recent ones by the same author, attempts to go beyond a simple description of a games repertoire in order to analyze their value in children's everyday life.

Our work aims to analyze play as a crucial experience in childhood which contributes to outlining many development trajectories in specific contexts. This is why we are interested in the multiple variables which participate in play and we analyze it as part of children's routine activities in the domestic environment.

The value given to play in everyday life in terms of achieving objectives relevant to children's development and socialization must be understood in relation to adults' expectations as regards their children, which vary according to gender and age. Therefore it is important to consider the local life cycle in order to understand how children's activities differ according to each life cycle stage and gender. These expectations are based upon parental ethnotheories, which we consider heterogenous social constructions that include and work out knowledge and values from a variety of sources present in each community (Remorini, 2012).

In this way, the main differences observed in the play behavior between the two contexts (Molinos communities and Mbya-Guarani communities) show the differences in the parents' ethnotheories as regards the activities, knowledge and skills children should develop for their present and future.

Adults in Mbya communities use the expression *ñevanga poranguei* to refer to little children, 'the privileged that play' (Cadogan, 1992), while older children are required to have more commitment to tasks essential for the domestic group's subsistence. As we said previously, parents stressed that most games constitute training for their future as adults, despite economic changes and lower dedication to 'traditional' sustenance activities. On account of this, both in Mbya communities as well as on the outskirts and the hills in the case of Molinos, children have a sound knowledge of the environment, their resources and the way to use them thanks to their early participation in household sustenance activities. Children accompany their parents, participate in some instances of the sustenance activities or they simply observe. In relation to this, Rogoff's (2007) and Gaskings's (2000) investigations stress the importance of the observation in the learning process: infants spend most of their time observing what adults and other children do and they pay careful attention to the activities performed by others. In this

way they learn different skills and then try to reproduce and practise them during their play (Figure 5). Scenes one, five and six described above constitute an example of this.



Regarding the value of observation as a method for learning, we recorded differences between the two communities. In Mbya communities observation is the method by which adults expect children to learn many physical skills and also vocabulary related with different activities. Thus, adults rarely speak to young children unless it is to tell them to do something (or not to do something) or to offer information they think the child needs to do a task (Remorini, 2009). By contrast, in Molinos and mainly in the center of the town, where mothers have a higher education level, they tend to give a prominent place to verbal and intentional teaching, using 'didactic' expressions as well as 'childish expressions'. This kind of adult-child communication is not frequently seen in Mbya communities.

In both enclaves, and despite the mentioned differences, little children's playmates are usually their elder siblings and their mothers in the first place, children from other households (more rarely in the case of Molinos) and hardly ever fathers or other adults.

In both cases adult women are responsible, almost exclusively, for the child's care during the first months of life and men remain most of the time out of their home participating in economic activities. However, women from Molinos devote little time to play with their babies, with their interaction mainly motivated by the child's need (feeding, sleeping, hygiene, etc). In town, women play and spend more time with their little children rather than on the outskirts. In contrast, Mbya women spend more time playing with their babies, and from the age of 2-3, fathers have more contact and play with boys. As we have already said, when children can walk they are introduced to groups of other

children, they play with them and are looked after by them most of the time.

In this way, the time children share with their family (at least the first years of age) is conditioned by the household organization and the expectations in relation to men's and women's activities and their participation in child rearing. Despite the differences recorded, in both enclaves women's activities substantially affect space, time and the kind of play partners available for children. Finally, in Molinos some families send their children from the age of three onwards to school institutions (nursery school, kindergarten) where they are looked after, they learn and interact with other children and adults who do not belong to their immediate social environment.

As we stated at the beginning of this article, different disciplinary approaches focus on play as an activity that helps children to develop cognitive, affective and social skills. Play allows them to express their creativity, to control their body and mobility, to gain knowledge of their social and physical environment, and contributes to solving problems and learning about social rules (Piaget, 1994; Erikson, 1959; Dewey, 1910; Chokler, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978; Scheines, 1999).

In this sense, a comprehensive analysis of children's play activities can contribute to broadening the concept of 'children's development', considering the various processes involved. Playing enables children to establish a special relationship with the world which is affected by rules and often, mediated by objects. In this sense, Dewey (1910) posits that playing is a way of actively getting to know the world and relating to it. As we showed in the scenes selected, in pretend-play these objects can be transformed, appropriated, re-elaborated by the children as 'toys'. According to this, play can be seen as an expression of individual creativity and agency. Children use their body to improvise 'toys' and 'games', they transform objects available in their environment, and apply the rules learnt by direct observation and active participation in activities shared with members of their environment. Some scenes described earlier are good examples of this.

As Scheines (1999) states, even the 'exploration' of objects implies submission to the rules of the matter one is playing with, to its possibilities and limitations. In this sense, play creates or improvises an order. When children play with other people, rules become a central component of the social dimension of the game since they mediate the interactions among participants (see for example scenes 2, 3 and 6).

Games offer models for social interaction and ways of learning 'culturally appropriate' skills in the frame of the niche of development. According to recent studies on learning processes (Rogoff, 2007, 2010; Paradise and Haan, 2009), through their play activities children interact with and interpret their physical and human environment and become active participants of the community in which they grow up. In this sense,

they state that 'the know how' is a kind of knowledge that is learned in a 'community of practice', that is, through children's commitment to do the everyday tasks by means of – in the beginning – play and exploration (Rogoff, Moore, Behnosh, Dexter, Correa-Chavez and Solís, 2007; Paradise and Hann, 2009). Consequently, play is a central formative experience for children because it allows them to acquire experiences and knowledge that provides them with opportunities to become part of a community.

Based upon our analysis of these experiences, we conclude that children apprehend knowledge about the world from adults, peers and from their participation in concrete experiences. As Padawer and Enriz (2009) state, intergenerational knowledge transmission is an essentially heterogeneous process: it consists of different formative experiences, which at the same time, are conceived as a contextualized socializing process.

The ethnographic approach to play allows us also to link the changes in cultural practices through generations and associate them to broader ecological transformations in each enclave, including subsistence activities, family organization, and education opportunities. All of these aspects have a decisive impact on the goals of children's socialization.

Finally, we would like to highlight that by observing children's play in the framework of inter and intragenerational relationships, we can identify cultural continuity and change in each developmental niche. In relation to this, we would like to emphasize the heuristic value of a systematic and in-depth description of routine activity as the first step in understanding the cultural construction of children's early experiences and pathways of development as well as identifying the intracultural diversity characteristic of each developmental niche (Remorini, 2010).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by the National University of La Plata and the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET). We want to thank all members of both populations for their cooperation and warm hospitality during our fieldwork. We wish to dedicate this work to all people who shared their knowledge with us and especially to the children of both communities. Finally, special thanks to the reviewers for their comments and invaluable contributions to the final version of this article.

Appendix 1.

Form code:			
Video code:			
Time dimension	Day of the week/moment of the day/season		
	Starting time		
	Total time of record:		
	Main activities of child/children observed		
	Recorded frequency for record main activities		
	Physical space where activities take place		
	Characteristics		
	Objects/materials used		
	Construction/manufacture/ transformation of		
	materials for ongoing activities		
	Characteristics of materials used for play available at the moment		
Origin of materials			
Social dimension	Number of Participants:		
	Play partners		
	Other individuals present at playtime whose actions are related to those of children or who interact with them		
	Kind of play partner	frequent	
		occasional	

	1. P1 (ID):	Sex
		Age
	2. P2 (ID):	Sex
		Age
	3. P3 (ID):	Sex
		Age
	4. P4 (ID):	Sex
		Age
	Relationship among them	
	Who starts the activity and how	Main activities on record 1. 2....
	Who finishes the activity and how	1. 2....
	Behaviors observed	Participant 1
		Participant 2:
		Participant 3:
		Participant 4:
	Oral/Linguistic expressions during the activity	Participant 1:
		Participant 2:
		Participant 3:
		Participant 4:
	Playful use of body (movements, gestures, postures)	
Third parties or caregiver's attitudes and interventions		
Rules, sanctions		
Comments/aspects to be highlighted:		
Source: Film record		

Figure 6. Molinos, Salta Province

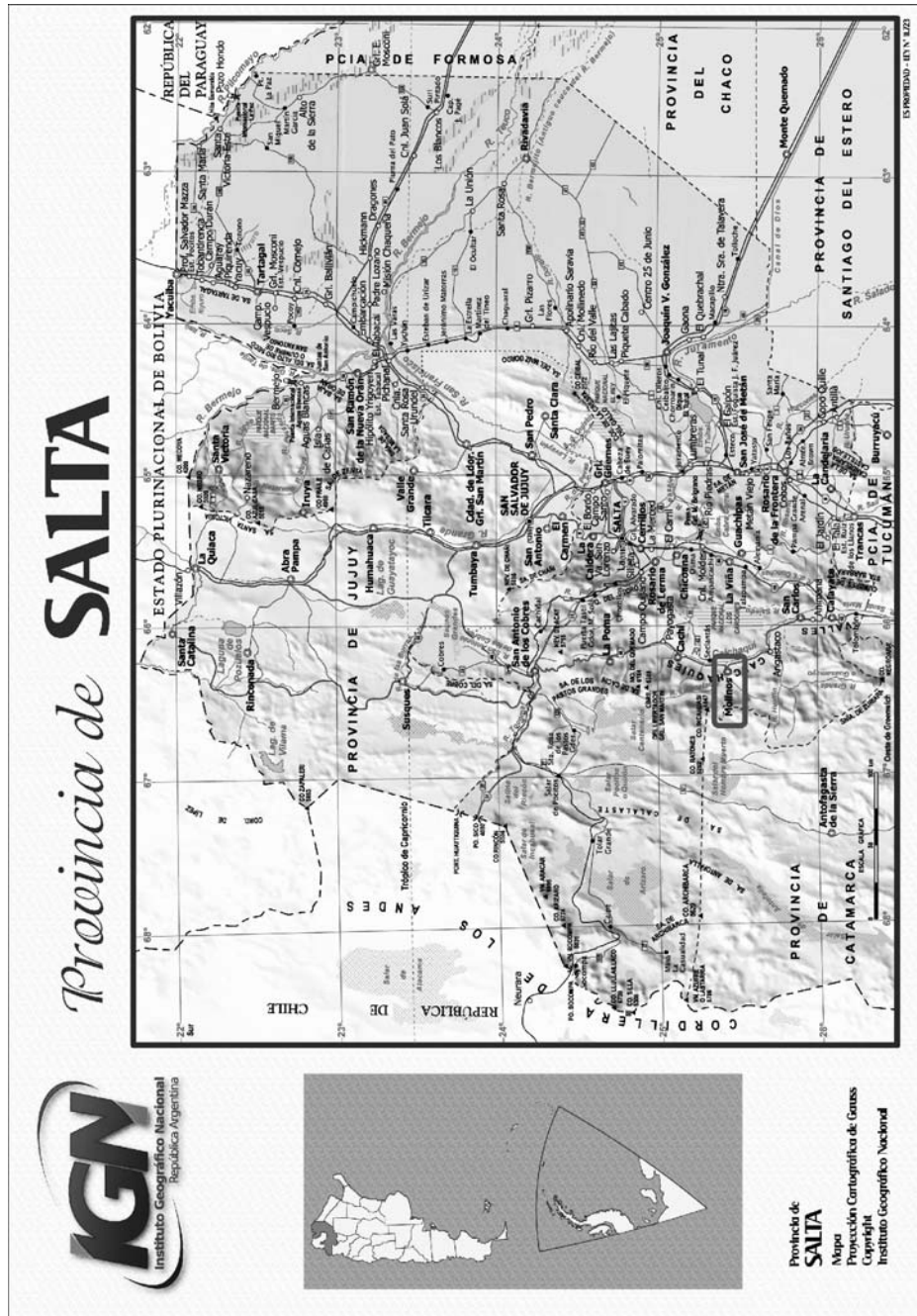
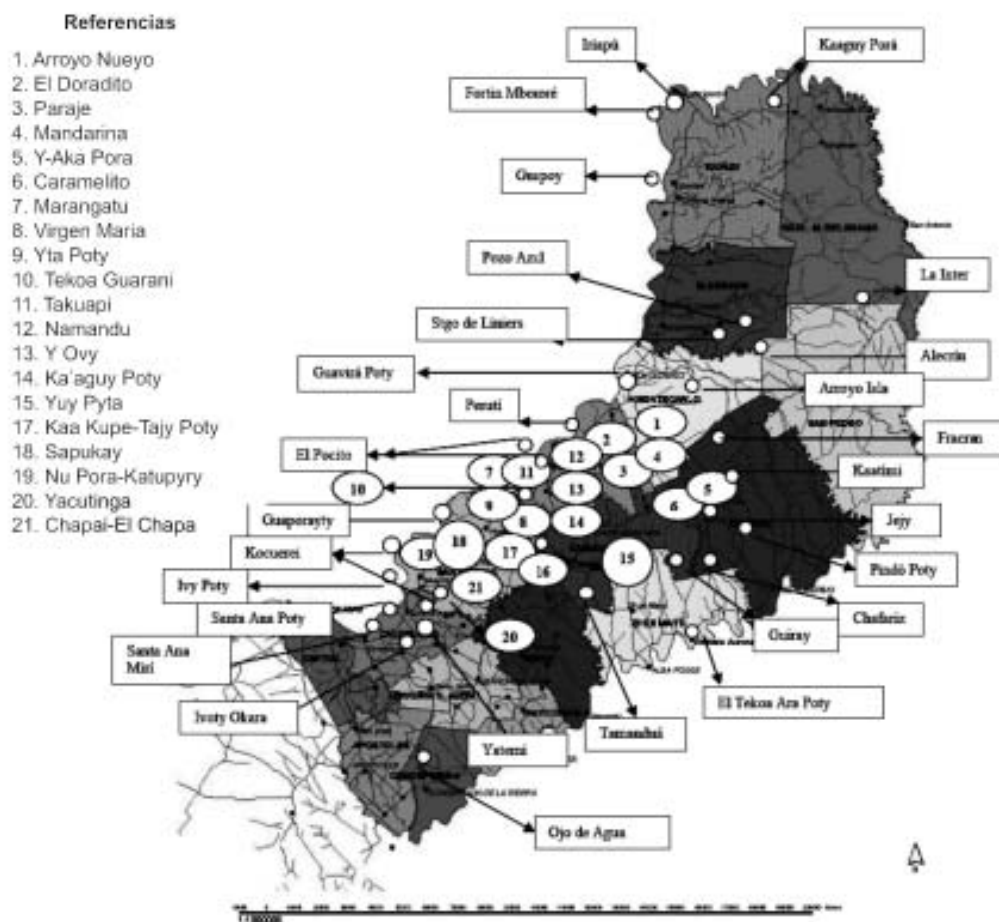


Figure 7. Mbya Guarani communities, Misiones Province



Mapa Comunidades Mbya Guaraní de la Provincia de Misiones Fuente : Dirección Nacional de Catastro. Gobierno de la Provincia de Misiones.

Notes :

¹ The Mbya Guaraní communities are located in Misiones Province (Northeastern Argentina). Their language belongs to the Tupí-Guaraní linguistic family. According to recent estimations there are around 3975 people in Argentina who identify themselves as belonging to the Mbya people (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos). At present, they still perform their 'traditional' subsistence activities based on the exploitation of forest resources (hunting, gathering, 'slash-and-burn' horticulture, fishing) but with less intensity compared with the past. Handicraft selling, temporary paid jobs in 'colonias' (rural settlements devoted to the production of yerba mate, tea, tobacco and tung) and government allowances and salary contribute to the maintenance of most households. (See Figure 7)

Molinos is a rural population located in the Calchaquí Valleys of Northwest Argentina (Salta Province). In this area, initially inhabited by indigenous peoples called 'diaguita' or 'calchaquí', some groups speaking 'quechua' – coming from the Inca expansion – settled in the fifteenth century, resulting in a certain homogeneity in cultural patterns common to the whole Andean region. The town of Molinos is a rural village located 2020 meters above sea level. It was founded about the middle of the 17th century, and, nowadays, it has a population of 1000 inhabitants. The present population constitutes a mixture of indigenous and hispanic elements. Most people define themselves as 'criollos' and Catholics, even though they continue to believe in 'Pachamama' and other deities and supernatural agents and engage in rituals related to them. The present economy is based on vast farm production, cattle breeding and domestic farming for self-consumption. Although some people are still performing those activities, young people are mainly engaged in other tasks such as commerce, wage-earning jobs – both inside and outside Molinos – or even state administrative jobs and, to a lesser degree, professional or technical practice at hospitals or schools. Tourism is also at present an important source of income. (See Figure 6)

² The codes next to each scene refer to place and date of fieldwork in which each of such scenes was recorded.

³ *Mbaraka*: ritual rattle (Cadogan, 1992: 106).

⁴ *Takuapu*: rhythm stick made of takuara cane (*Chusquea ramosissima*). Instrument used exclusively by women.

⁵ *Opy*: Mbya term for 'church' or the house in which the Mbya perform traditional rituals (Cadogan, 1992).

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